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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relation between social status and negotiation strategies in preschool boys and girls. With the use of peer nominations, 84 preschool children were classified as liked, disliked, or low-impact. Children were videotaped in free play interactions in which one child entered the play of a pair of same-sex peers. Liked children were more likely to agree to and extend the ideas of peers, seek clarification of peers' suggestions, and explain ongoing play to newcomers. Disliked children were more likely to reject the ideas of playmates, attempt to impose their own ideas on the group, and use a fairly high proportion of their conversation to describe their own activities. Results indicated that skills contributing to the establishment and maintenance of coherent discourse, and cohesive versus dispersive social interaction, may be related to social status among peers. However, the strategies used may also reflect the fact that boys of all status groups may seek a more overtly dominant role in social interaction than do girls. (Author/RH)

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# Negotiation in social pretend play: Strategy use as a function of social status.

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relation between social status and negotiation strategies in preschool boys and girls. Using peer nominations, 84 preschool children were classified as liked, disliked, or low-impact. Children were videotaped in
free play interactions in which one child entered the play of a pair of same-sex peers.
Liked children were more likely to agree to and extend the ideas of peers, to seek clarification of the suggestions of peers, and to explain ongoing play to newcomers. Disliked children were more likely to reject the ideas of playmates, to attempt to impose their own ideas upon the group, and to use a fairly high proportion of their conversation to describe their own activities. Results indicate that skills contributing to the establishment and maintenance of coherent discourse and cohesive versus dispersive social interaction may be related to social status among peers; however, the specific strategies used may also reflect the fact that boys of all status groups may seek a more overtly dominant role in social interaction than do girls which is reflected in the specific types of strategies used.

There is considerable evidence to demonstrate that children with low levels of peer acceptance display less adequate social relations in later life (Asher, Oden, & Gottman, 1977; Furman, Rahe, & Hartup, 1979; Hartup, 1970). As a result of these findings, recent research has examined factors associated with popularity and rejection, as measured by sociometric questionnaires, (Coie & Kupersmidt, 1983; Dodge, 1983; Gottman & Parkhurst, 1980). These studies on the relation between social acceptance and social behavior, have largely focused on the consequences of prosocial versus antisocial behavior (Asher, Renshaw, & Hymel, 1982). That is, children with higher social status among their peers have been found to be more group-oriented, less likely to be disruptive, and less likely to draw attention to themselves or to use self-referent communication tactics (Dodge, Schlundt, Schocken, & Delugach, 1983; Putallaz, 1983). They have been described as more likely to engage in cooperative play and more likely to be received positively by peers (Coie & Dodge, 1983; Dodge, 1983; Ladd, 1983). Rejected status children, on the other hand, have been found to be more disruptive (Coie & Dodge, 1983); more argumentative (Coie & Kupersmidt, 1983; Ladd, 1983); to exhibit less cohesive styles of communication (Markell & Asher, 1984); to make more statements drawing attention to themselves (Putallaz & Gottman, 1981; Putallaz, 1983); and to be more agonistic and distractible than any other status group (Rubin & Daniels-Bierness, 1983).

Behaviors of children with high social status appear to include skills that may contribute to cohesive social interaction (i.e., interaction characterized by the maintenance of social proximity and the continuation of social exchange), while those of lower status children appear to lack these skills and, at least in the case of rejected children, include behaviors that may contribute to dispersive social interaction (i.e., interaction characterized by a psychological separation of the children involved in interaction; Strayer, 1980). Most critical among these skills may be those involving communication with peers.

Communication skills have been found to be important in the establishment and maintenance of cohesive social interaction. Pairs of children, ages 3 to 9, who "hit it off" in their first meeting and later became friends were found to communicate in a connected fashion in which they exchanged information successfully and established a common-ground topic more often than did less successful pairs (Gottman, 1983). Social status differences have been found in communication skills that promote coherent discourse among preschool children. Specifically, liked children may be more inclined to direct their initiations to others clearly, to respond contingently to others, and to acknowledge the initiations of others (Hazen & Black, in press). Although studies have found specific aspects of communication to be related to children's social status, findings have not always been consistent. Whereas coaching low-status children to ask questions and to offer help and suggestions has been found in some studies to improve their status with peers (Bierman & Furman, 1984; Ladd, 1981), and, in some studies, low status children have been found to use "weak" rather than "strong" directives (Dodge, Pettit, McClaskey, & Brown, 1986); other studies have found no relation



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between social status and types of directives or asking questions and offering help and suggestions (Markell & Asher, 1984). The lack of consistent findings may be due, at least in part, to differences in the contexts of interaction. Subjects in the Markell and Asher study, for example, participated in a problem solving task that required cooperative behavior; however, subjects in the Dodge et al. (1986) study were required to enter a group, which may produce more social tension and elicit more dominant and submissive behaviors. It may be that investigations of aspects of communication that are correlated with social status may be more generalizable if the context of interaction provides opportunities to observe cooperative behaviors as well as the dominant and submissive behaviors evident in an entry situation. For young children, sociodramatic play provides an opportunity to observe both types of behaviors.

The negotiation strategies required to initiate and maintain episodes of interactive pretense are not unlike those involved in a problem solving task; furthermore, it is in the nature of sociodramatic play that renegotiation of episodes takes place frequently (Nelson & Seidman, 1984) thus providing an opportunity to observe behaviors like those used in an entry task throughout a given play session. The negotiation skills needed for this type of play are complex social skills that may have an impact on the whole of social development. Skills related to at least four classes of social knowledge may be acquired in sociodramatic play: (a) successful strategies for bargaining and negotiation; (b) techniques for entry into an informal group; (c) conventions for structuring pretend play; and, (d) a knowledge of the tacit rules which govern possession or disposition of objects, of space, and the rights to carry out certain actions (Garvey, 1986). Of these, the first three represent knowledge of specific skills related to social communication with peers.

A primary purpose of this study was to investigate negotiation strategies children use to initiate and maintain episodes of social pretend play as a function of social status. Two aspects of children's communication were examined: the extent to which children used eight specific negotiation strategies; and the extent to which children used five specific description strategies in their communication. Each of the thirteen strategies examines one or more of the dimensions of social competence found in earlier studies to be related to social status, that is, aspects of relevance, responsiveness, and coherent discourse or group-oriented communication.

Consistent differences sex differences have been found in children's pretend play behaviors (DiPietro, 1981; Goldberg & Lewis, 1969; Jacklin, Maccoby, & Dick, 1973; McCall, 1974) as well as their behaviors related to relevance, responsiveness and cooperativeness (Gilligan, 1982). Specifically, school-age girls appear to be more likely than boys to engage in turn-taking games and other activities in which conflict is unlikely or indirect, and boys appear to choose activities with variable or debatable rules from which conflict, and thus disruption of the activity, is more likely (Lever, 1976). In preschool-aged children, the types of themes used and the proportion of play found in coherent episodes of pretense has been found to differ among boys and girls. Girls were found to participate in longer more coherent episodes of pretense using easily shared topics, while boys' play sessions consisted of multiple short episodes of more complex, less easily shared topics (Black, in press). Of three-year-old children observed in dyads, girls were more likely to attempt to join in the activity of playmates, whereas boys were more likely to pursue their own ideas for play (Jennings & Suwalsky,1982). There is further evidence to suggest that in 5 and 9 year old children, the predominant mode of dealing with conflict for boys is initially more direct and "heavy-handed" than that of girls whose predominant mode of dealing with conflict is more indirect and typically includes the use of mitigating strategies aimed at the maintenance of interpersonal harmony (Miller, Danaher, & Forbes, 1986). As a result of the demonstrated differences found in negotiation strategies and play skills between boys and girls a secondary purpose of this study was to investigate sex differences and differences related to the interaction of social status and sex in children's use of negotiation strategies in play.

Based on earlier studies of peer status, specific hypotheses for this study were: First, that liked children would use negotiation strategies that played a role in the establishment and maintenance of cohesive social interaction, specifically, strategies that: (a) contributed relevant information to the play group (i.e., seeking to clarify the themes and roles suggested by others, and explaining ongoing play themes and roles to other children in the play group); and (b) indicated responsiveness to others (i.e., accepting and extending the suggestions of others, and offeringpeers a choice by using the less demanding type directive, suggestions, rather than commands when providing themes and roles for play). Second, that disliked children would use strategies that contributed to dispersive social interaction, specifically, strategies that: (a) failed to contribute relevant information to the play group (i.e., drawing attention to themselves by using higher proportions of conversation describing their own activities); and (b) failed to indicate responsiveness to peers (i.e., failing to clarify themes and explain play to newcomers; demanding, by using more strong directives, that their ideas be used in play; and rejecting the ideas of others). Third, that children with low social impact scores would differ from high and low status children in ways related to their less powerful membership status, that is, they would be less likely to engage in dominance related negotiation strategies, such as, using directives (either strong or weak) in the distribution of themes and roles in play; and that they would be less likely to explain roles or

themes to newcomers leaving that task to more dominant players (following Forys & McCune-Nicolich, 1984).

Finally, based on earlier studies of sex differences in peer interaction, it was predicted that: (a) girls would be more likely than boys to demonstrate negotiation strategies in pretend play interaction; (b) boys, when employing negotiation strategies, would be more likely than girls to use strategies that implied dominance, (i.e., using stronger directives that required compliance, and participating in more monologue type descriptions of their own activities); whereas, girls would be more likely to use suggestions that implied a more submissive role in play; and (c) boys would be more likely to use strategies that disrupted ongoing play while girls would be more likely to employ strategies that would offer social support and nurturance, such as seeking clarification and providing explanations of ongoing play.

## Method

The subjects were 90 preschool children who attended a university-based laboratory school. There were 46 boys and 44 girls in the seven participating classes. The subjects were children of students, faculty, and members of the community at large;the mean age was 54 months.

**Procedures.**

Sociometric measure. A positive- and negative-nomination measure was administered to all children. Children were taken individually to a separate room, presented with photographs of all of their classmates, and asked to identify them. All children identified their classmates easily. For the positive-nomination measure, children were asked, "Who do you like to play with the most?" After the child selected a picture, that picture was removed, and the question was repeated twice so that each child selected a total of three liked classmates. The same procedure was used for the negative-nomination measure, except that children were asked, "Is there someone here that you don't like to play with? Who is it that you don't like to play with the most?" Again, the question was repeated twice so that each child could select a total of three disliked classmates.

Each child received a Liked (L) and Disliked (D) score based respectively on the number of positive and negative nominations he or she received. These scores were standardized (converted to z scores) in relation to the mean and standard deviation of each class. Children were then divided into four sociometric groups on the basis of their Liked and Disliked scores as follows: Liked Status (L score greater than 0, and D score less than 0); Disliked Status ( L score less than 0, and D score greater than 0); Low-impact Status (both scores less than 0); and Mixed Status (both scores greater than 0). The terms liked, disliked, low-impact, and mixed are used in the present study rather than the more familiar popular, rejected, neglected, and controversial, since the latter terms commonly refer to children with extreme sociometric scores, following the categorization procedure developed by Coie, Dodge, & Coppotelli (1982). In their procedure, popular children are defined as those with standardized acceptance scores greater than 1, rejected children those with standardized rejection scores greater than 1 and neglected children those with standardized social impact scores (positive plus negative nominations) less than 1. Since the measures used in the present study were able to detect differences in less extreme but clearly defined social status groups, mean splits of acceptance and rejection scores were used to differentiate groups and the more accurate terminology of liked, disliked, low-impact, and mixed-status was used to refer to the resulting groups.

The liked group consisted of 27 children (11 boys and 16 girls), the disliked group consisted of 28 children (18 boys and 10 girls), the low-impact group consisted of 29 children (14 boys and 15 girls), and the mixed group consisted of 6 children (3 boys and 3 girls). The mixed group was not included in the data analysis because of its relatively small size. Thus analyses were based on 84 subjects.

Observation of naturally occurring behavior. After sociometric measures were obtained, each child was observed as the Entry Child for an ongoing play session of two known peers. Two criteria were used whenever possible to group children into triads. First, children were not grouped with peers they had chosen on the positive and negative sociometric measures. Second, no two triads were made up of the same three children. These criteria could not be met for some of the extremely liked or disliked children; such children at times had to be grouped with others who had chosen them as 2nd- or 3rd-choice liked or disliked classmates; however, no child ever entered a dyad in which he or she had been chosen by either host as a first choice liked or disliked classmate. In order to meet this final criterion, on two occasions, the same triad was observed twice, with a different child in the role of Entry Child each time.

An experimenter brought two members of each triad into a small room containing props designed to elicit social play (e.g., housekeeping toys, men's and women's dress-up clothes, blocks, transportation toys, and ambiguous props such as stacking cubes and boards). The children were told that they were free to play with anything in the room, and that the experimenter would be back in ten minutes with another child. Their interactions were then videotaped with a hidden camera. After 10 minutes, the third child (the Entry Child) was brought into the room, and the interactions of all three children were videotaped for 10 more minutes.

**Data Reduction.**

Transcribing and coding procedures. For the present study, only the data from the triads (i.e., the last ten minutes of each session, beginning with the entry of the third child) were transcribed, coded, and analyzed. The behavior of children in the Entry Child rôle was examined for this study. Each play session was completely transcribed, including all verbal communi-

cations and any nonlinguistic sounds or behaviors that served a communicative function, such as pointing out a location or handing someone a toy. The content of all transcripts was double-checked by the author, and disagreements were resolved by the coders during the final coding process. Coders chunked transcripts into initiations (any utterance that functioned as a sentence) and responses (any utterance that is predicted by and responds to a preceding utterance) and applied the coding systems to these units. Reliability for chunking was .95 in the reliability sample.

Coding categories. All initiations and responses were first classified according to their relation to pretense (i.e., Nonpretend, Enacting Pretense, or Negotiations and Descriptions of Pretense). Following this classification, all discourse units identified as Negotiations and Descriptions of Pretense were coded using one of two code systems: First, the Negotiation Code consisted of six subcategories designed to assess strong and weak directives where three types of strong directives were examined: (a) directives requiring compliance in relation to themes in play; (b) directives requiring compliance in relation to the assignment of roles to others; and (c) directives requiring compliance of others to roles for one's self. In the same fashion, three types of weak directives were examined: (a) directives suggesting themes; (b) directives suggesting roles for others; and (c) directives suggesting roles for one's self. This same code system also included two subcategories designed to measure acceptance or rejection of the ideas of others: (a) a measure of acceptance (Accept and Extend) that assessed the extent to which a child indicated responsiveness to peers by agreeing to a directive or suggestion while at the same time contributing to the play by extending the idea to include additional related material. It was specifically hypothesized that this tactic would be employed by higher status socially dominant children to both provide structure to the play of the group and serve as a vehicle for the transmission of shared knowledge among peers; and (b) in contrast, a measure of rejection of directives and suggestions (Reject Theme or Role) designed to assess the extent to which children may have failed to cue responsiveness by simply rejecting the ideas of others.

Second, the three-item Description Code system included both peer-directed items that served to: (a) Explain Themes or Roles (i.e., extent to which children offered explanations to their peers of ongoing play themes and roles); (b) Seek Clarification of Roles and of Themes (i.e., questions children asked of their peers in order to clarify for themselves the themes and roles offered by others); and (c) a self-referent item that assessed the extent to which children offered initiations that served only to describe their own ongoing activity in the play. Subcategories of the coding systems are described completely in the Appendix.

Reliability for all code categories for each of the code systems was assessed by comparing the coding of three independent coders (who were blind to the hypotheses as well as to child status) with that of the author who served as reliability checker. A total of 990 pages of handwritten transcript were obtained. Coders used videotapes accompanied by written transcripts for all coding. They were permitted to view interaction segments as often as desired before selecting appropriate codes. Coders were trained by the author and were required to obtain kappa coefficients (Cohen, 1960) of greater than .85 for all code categories on transcripts from two training tapes before beginning the actual coding. Random tapes from the transcripts of each play session were selected for reliability testing with a total of 33% used for the reliability sample. Reliability for each coder was checked at ten day intervals during the coding period. Reliability coefficients remained at least .86 over the assessments required to complete the coding. Mean inter rater proportional agreements for code items were as follows: Interaction Type (Nonpretend), .92; (Enactment of Pretense), .94; Negotiation of Pretense Code system: (Assign Theme), .87; (Assign Role to Other), .88; (Assign Role to Self), .86; (Suggest Theme), .85; (Suggest Role for Other), .86; (Suggest Role for Self), .88; (Accept Theme or Role and Extend), .90; (Reject Theme or Role), .91; Description of Pretense Code System: (Explain Ongoing Themes), 87; (Explain Ongoing Roles), .86; (Seek Clarification of Theme), .88; (Seek Clarification of Roles), .86; (Description of Own Activity), .86.

## Results

### Dependent Measures and Data Analysis

Dependent measures were calculated for each child. Conversation coded as nonpretend, enacting pretend, or negotiation and description of pretend were each examined as a proportion of the target child's total conversation. The specific subcategories of negotiation strategies were measured by calculating each of the separate items in the negotiation coding system (Assign Theme, Assign Role for Other, Assign Role for Self, Suggest Theme, Suggest Role for Other, Suggest Role for Self, Agree to Theme or Role and Extend, Reject Theme or Role) as a proportion of the total in the category Negotiations and Descriptions of Pretense. The specific description strategies were measured by calculating each of the separate items in the description coding system (Explain Ongoing Themes, Explain Ongoing Roles, Seek Clarification of Theme, Seek Clarification of Roles, and Describe Own Activity) as a proportion of the total in the category Negotiations and Descriptions of Pretense.

Because all dependent variables were converted to proportions which typically result in skewed distributions and heterogeneity of variance, they were subjected to arcsin transformations prior to analysis to stabilize the variance (Winer, 1971). No effects were found for the order in which children were in the role of Entry Child (whether the first, second or third time to participate in triadic interaction). Measures of interaction type and strategies for negotiation and description of pretense were subjected to two separate 3 (Status) x 2 (Sex) multivariate analy-

ses of variance (MANOVAs).

**Analysis of Interaction Types in Relation to Pretense**

The MANOVA for the three measures of interaction type revealed the predicted significant multivariate effects for social status, $F(6, 154) = 63.72$, $p < .001$ (The Wilks lambda criterion was used for all multivariate F statistics.); and for sex, $F(3, 76) = 83.68$, $p < .001$; as well as a significant interaction of social status and sex, $F(6, 152) = 24.32$, $p < .001$. Duncan Multiple Range tests ($p < .05$) were performed on status group means of the measures for which significant status effects were found. These post hoc tests revealed that liked status children had a lower proportion of communication in nonpretend (Means: liked = .27, disliked = .38, and low-impact = .37) and enacting pretend (Means: liked = .25, disliked = .40, and low-impact = .30) than did either other group and a higher proportion of conversation used to negotiate and describe pretend (Means: liked = .47, disliked = .21, and low-impact = .32) than did either other status group. Disliked status children had the highest proportion of conversation enacting pretend and the lowest proportion negotiating and describing pretend. Low-impact status children did not differ significantly from disliked children in the extent to which they used nonpretend communication but all groups differed from each other on the other two measures (according to Duncan Multiple Ranges tests).

Following the significant multivariate effect for sex, univariate tests revealed significant effects for nonpretend conversation, $F(1, 78) = 14.85$, $p < .001$; enacting pretense, $F(1,78) = 22.35$, $p < .001$; and negotiation of pretense, $F(1, 78) = 18.79$, $p < .001$. The extent to which girls conversed about nonpretend topics was less than that of boys (Means = .32 versus .37); boys were more likely to enact pretend than were girls (Means = .39 versus .25); and girls were more likely, as predicted, to use conversation negotiating and describing pretend than were boys (Means = .43 versus .25).

Table 1 displays the mean proportions, standard deviations, and F ratios for the univariate analyses of the interaction of social status and sex for the three measures of interaction type. (All tables display non-transformed proportions). Girls in the liked and low-impact groups participated in a lower proportion of nonpretend conversation than did boys, however, girls and boys in the disliked group did not differ in the extent to which they participated in nonpretend conversation. Girls and boys differed in the same direction for all other interactions but the proportion of difference varied by status group.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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**Analysis of Strategies for Negotiation and Description of Pretense**

The MANOVA for the eight measures of negotiation strategies and the five measures of description strategies revealed, as predicted, a significant multivariate effect for social status, $F(26, 132) = 13.39$, $p < .001$; sex, $F(13, 66) = 7.00$, $p < .001$; as well as the interaction of social status and sex, $F(26, 132) = 3.36$, $p < .001$. Table 2 displays mean proportions, standard deviations, and F ratios for the univariate analyses of social status for the 13 dependent measures of negotiation and description strategies. Liked status children and low-impact children used lower proportions of conversation to assign and (contrary to the prediction made) suggest themes and roles to others than did the disliked status group of children. Liked status children, as predicted, were more likely than either other group and disliked children were the least likely to accept and extend the play ideas of others. Disliked children were, as predicted, more likely to reject the ideas of others. Strategies used to describe ongoing play also differed by status group with liked children being most likely to explain ongoing themes and roles to others and disliked status children least likely to do so. Liked status and low-impact children were more likely than disliked children to seek to clarify the themes and roles in play and disliked status children were more likely than either other group to spend a fairly substantial proportion of their conversation describing the play in terms of their own activity.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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Univariate analysis demonstrated that children differed across sex in their use of the five negotiation and three description strategies. As predicted, boys were more likely than girls to use strong directives to assign roles to others (Means = .04 versus .009), $F(1, 78) = 6.85$, $p < .01$; girls were more likely than boys to use weaker directives to suggest roles to others in play (Means = .04 versus .01), $F(1, 78) = 11.17$, $p < .001$; and boys were more likely than girls to assign roles to themselves (Means = .04 versus .01), $F(1, 78) = 5.66$, $p < .02$. Boys were also more likely than girls to reject the ideas of others (Means = .12 versus .07), $F(1, 78) = 12.88$, $p < .001$ and girls were more likely than boys to accept and extend the ideas of others (Means = .21 versus .11), $F(1, 78) = 21.50$, $p < .001$. Girls were more likely than boys to clarify themes (Means = .18 versus .11), $F(1, 78) = 12.53$, $p < .001$ and to clarify roles (Means = .12 versus .07), $F(1, 78) = 12.28$, $p < .001$; and boys were more likely than girls to describe play in terms of their own activity (Means = .28 versus .14), $F(1, 78) = 20.92$, $p < .001$.

Table 3 displays the mean proportions, standard deviations, and F ratios for the univariate analyses of the interaction of social status and sex for the eight measures of negotiation strategy types and the five measures of description strategy types. There were significant interaction effects for status and sex in children's style of negotiation in five of the eight negotiation strategy types: Disliked status children differed by sex in the extent to which they assigned roles to others in that boys were more likely than girls to use this strategy; however, disliked girls more often than disliked boys used the "weaker" style of directive and suggested themes and roles in play, and liked boys more often than liked girls used weaker directives to suggest themes and roles for themselves in play. Liked girls moreso

than liked boys rejected the ideas of others but disliked boys rejected the ideas of others more often than disliked girls. There were no differences among low-impact status children in the interaction of social status and sex and there were no significant interaction effects for the description strategy types.

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Insert Table 3 about here

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## Discussion

This study examined negotiation strategies young children use in collaborative pretend play as a function of social status and sex. Results indicate that skills contributing to the establishment and maintenance of coherent discourse and cohesive versus dispersive social interaction may be related to social status among peers; however the specific strategies used may also reflect the fact that boys of all status groups may seek a more overtly dominant role in social interaction than do girls which is reflected in the specific types of strategies used.

Negotiation and description strategies used social pretend play involve not only the social skills involved in the distribution of roles and themes in collaborative play, but also the metacommunication skills needed to provide a jointly developed plan for interactive pretense. This type of metacommunication includes the assessment and transmission of shared knowledge among peers. As was predicted, children differed by social status in the extent to which they used negotiation strategies when engaged in pretend play with peers. This finding may be important to several different aspects of children's social development. Presumably, when young children are engaged in discourse with peers they have to rely upon each other to share meanings and convey ideas. It may be, however, that less socially skilled children are either unable to sustain the more complex discourse required to negotiate themes and roles in pretense or it may be that they are unwilling to attempt conversation that is more heavily dependent upon the contributions of others.

Rejected and neglected status children have been found to receive fewer positive responses than do popular children (Dodge, 1983), it may be that children in these status groups develop, because they receive fewer positive responses, a style of communication that avoids putting themselves in the position of depending upon the responses of others. They might, in that case, avoid attempts to negotiate with peers, at least in any reciprocal fashion, in order to avoid the likelihood of receiving a negative response. This may explain their behavior of enacting pretense without the supporting metacommunication needed to assure transmission of shared meanings that is found in the communication of more socially competent children. Furthermore, although disliked and low-impact status children participated in the same proportion of nonpretend conversation, a closer look suggests that low-impact status children appear to have divided their conversation fairly evenly across the three types of interaction; whereas disliked children spent a higher proportion of their conversation enacting pretense. Low-impact status children appear to demonstrate a somewhat different pattern in their lower use of negotiation strategies. Because they evenly divide their conversation across the three interaction types, it may be that their behavior reflects their less dominant role in the interaction Forys and McCune-Nicolich (1984) have described a system that involves consideration of children's pretend roles and the forms of realistic social interaction taking place while one or more members of a pretending group are enacting pretense.

Liked children, however, may initially assume a socially dominant role by providing structure to pretend play much the way mothers provide the structure in mother-child pretend play episodes (O'Connell & Bretherton, 1984). If this is the case, the social role of the liked child may be to directly influence the play of peers by providing support for themes and roles suggested by others and in this way to provide a structure that allows for the transmission of shared knowledge among the peer group. This interpretation is consistent with the finding of Coie and Kupersmidt (1983) that popular boys engaged in more norm setting behavior than rejected, neglected, or average status boys. Certainly the structuring of pretend play episodes may be considered a specific type of norm setting behavior more common to preschool age children than the older, school age children observed in most research investigating the correlates of social status.

Sex differences in the extent to which children used nonpretend, negotiations of pretense or enactments of pretense may support the notion that girls are socialized to give a higher priority to activities giving social support and nurturance to others (Gilligan,1982). It may be that for girls, providing structure to, and facilitating the flow of, ongoing play are a type of group-oriented behavior that provides social support to the activity of the group. Sex differences in the extent to which boys and girls participated in discourse related to negotiation of pretense may reflect a move by boys to assure a more overtly dominant role in play by avoiding negotiation. However, when specific strategies are examined, results of this study indicate that differences across sex may be more obvious for liked children than disliked or low-impact status children, and may be, overall, least pronounced for disliked status children

### Negotiation and Description Strategies

Social status differences. Results of this study indicate that relevance and responsiveness, descried in earlier studies as key dimensions of the prosocial behaviors related to peer status and social competence (Asher, 1983), can be examined in light of specific discourse strategies young children use in negotiating episodes of pretend play. This may be of considerable importance in the establishment and maintenance of peer status in young children.

There is evidence that young children devote a considerable proportion of their communication to creating, clarifying, maintaining, and negotiating social pretend play (Garvey & Berndt, 1977). In this type of play, children must coordinate their perspective of a make-believe event with that of other children while at the same time attempting to successfully maintain coherent social discourse. It appears from the results of this study that specific communication skills supporting the maintenance of coherent discourse rather than the imposition of play themes and roles upon others may be important to social status.

The pattern of liked children may be one of framing the play of others rather than dominating the selection of play themes and the distribution of roles among players. Contrary to the prediction that liked children would attempt to influence play by using suggestions rather than demands, results indicated that liked children used the same proportion of weak and strong directives but that disliked status children used a higher proportion of both types of directives than did either other group. The differences between these findings and those of Markell and Asher (1984) may be related to the fact that Markell and Asher observed children in dyads where, as they suggest, less popular children attempt to ingratiate themselves to their partners. However, in triadic play it may be that less popular children attempt to gain a dominant position by imposing their ideas on one or both other participants in hopes of gaining an ally; or it may be that they simply perceive that imposing their ideas for themes and roles upon others somehow gives them a dominant role in the play. They may further perceive that rejecting the ideas of others may make it more likely that theirs will be the themes and roles used in play. In addition to their attempts to impose their ideas on the group, disliked children fail to indicate responsiveness to their peers by either explaining ongoing play or seeking clarification of the ideas suggested by others. Their primary mode for conveying their ideas to others was through a series of monologues that described their own activity. These monologues were not responses to questions nor were they responsive to the interaction of the group. They appear to be a specific type of the self-referent behaviors found by earlier researchers (Dodge et al., 1983; Putallaz, 1983) to be related to negative social status.

A key difference between liked and disliked status children may be that the initiations and responses of liked children appear to relate, more than those of disliked children, to the overall process of playing. Liked children, rather than rejecting the ideas of others and suggesting their own, employ a strategy of insinuating their ideas into the play by agreeing to the ideas of others and then extending those ideas to include their own contributions to theme and role. They demonstrate responsiveness to their peers by seeking clarification and thereby cueing their interest to other participants as well as explaining aspects of the ongoing play to their peers. This responsiveness to the suggestions and needs of others appears to establish their role in the interaction as prosocial and reinforcing. Social status has been found to be correlated with prosocial and reinforcing behaviors for some time (Moore & Updegraf, 1964; Hartup, Glazer, & Charlesworth, 1967). What this study may demonstrate is that a process-oriented approach to examining the relation of discourse skills and social status provides information about how prosocial and reinforcing behaviors may be communicated to peers. It may be that among young children, liked children provide the "frame-of-reference" (Putallaz, 1983) by facilitating the transmission of shared knowledge and coordinating the production of connected discourse.

Sex differences. The communication of girls included more strategies that contributed to cohesive social interaction, that is, strategies that are more often associated with the maintenance of social proximity and the continuation of social exchange. Girls also demonstrated more skills indicating responsiveness to the conversation of others such as accepting and extending the play ideas of others and seeking to clarify the suggestions made by peers. Boys, on the other hand, appeared to use strategies more likely to lead to dispersive social interaction, that is, strategies, such as rejections, that are often followed by a disruption of play and the need to begin anew. Boys were more likely than girls to use strong directives, thus imposing their ideas upon peers, rather than suggestions; and their communication was additionally characterized by fairly lengthy descriptions of play in terms of their own activity. This strategy may be a somewhat egocentric attempt to explain play to peers or it may be a form of "grand standing" possibly used to avoid the rejections of peers that may occur in more symmetrical interaction.

Interactions of social status and sex. The interactions found indicate that differences that distinguish the communication styles of liked, disliked, and low-impact children may vary subtly depending upon the sex of the child. The fact that disliked boys chose strong directives and disliked girls weaker directives may only reflect socialization practices that make it more acceptable for females to suggest rather than demand. The interesting finding remains that disliked children on the whole seek to impose their ideas on the play of the peer group, but the forcefulness of the imposition varies for boys and girls.

Although girls, in general, tend to have more cohesive interaction styles, disliked girls do not appear to use cohesive communication strategies in their conversation with peers, they appear to seek to impose their ideas on the group by using a high proportion of suggestions concerning themes and roles for themselves and others. Given that nearly a third of the conversation negotiating pretense in disliked girls is devoted to suggestions made to others, it is possible that play episodes in which they are participants are fairly regularly disrupted by a continuous flow of suggestions. In one example, a disliked status girl was observed to insert a suggestion relating to a change in the ongoing play after every comment made by either other participant, fi-

nally, one of the other four year old girls turned to her in obvious exasperation and said, "Will you stop telling me that!" It may be that disliked girls demonstrate their attempts at dominance differently than disliked boys, but the goal of the interaction may remain the same, to attempt to dominate play by drawing attention to their own ideas and activities and thus to impose those ideas upon their peers.

In summary, it would appear that high social status is related to aspects of children's communication in play that lead to cohesive social interaction. The ability of liked children to demonstrate responsiveness to their peers, to provide scaffolding to the play ideas of others, and to facilitate the transmission of shared information among peers seems to be related to their high social status. The results also suggest that there may be differences in the way boys and girls attain their social status. It is possible that even very young children have different expectations of their peers' social behavior related to gender. Finally, the findings of this study suggest that the differences between liked and disliked children are often subtle rather than glaring. Clearly it would be of interest to determine if young children could articulate goals for their social interaction that might explain the orientation toward cohesive interaction demonstrated by liked children and the orientation toward dispersive interaction seen in less liked children.

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# APPENDIX

## Coding Categories

Relation to Pretense

Nonpretend Activity - Conversation unrelated to pretense. (e.g., "I don't like you."; "How many times have you been here to play?"; "I'm not going to play now."; "I am going to Mark's after school.")

Enactment of Pretense - Children assume a role and their actions and conversation are within the role. (e.g., "OK little baby, now mommy will feed you."; "Now I got you, give us back all the jewels or we will put you in jail!"; "Quick! Hide!!! the witch and her magic goat are coming!")

Negotiation and Description of Pretense - Conversation negotiating themes and roles includes assigning and/or suggesting themes and roles, rejecting themes and roles, and accepting themes and roles with initiations that extend the theme. Conversation describing pretense activities includes explaining and clarifying themes and roles and describing ones' own activity.

Negotiation Strategies

Assign Theme - A statement or command announcing a new theme for play. This code item does not include a stated or implied choice for the other players. (e.g., "Now we are gonna play robbers."; "OK, we are gonna pretend we are going to the store.")

Assign Role for Other - A statement or command announcing a new role for another participant. This code item does not include a stated or implied choice for the other players. (e.g., "You are gonna be the big sister."; "Joey is the chief and you are the bad guy.")

Assign Role for Self - A statement or command announcing a new role for one's self. (e.g., "I'm gonna be the mother."; "Now, I'm gonna be the sheriff")

Suggest Theme - A suggestion or request that a specific new theme be considered. This code item offers a choice to the other players. (e.g., "Do you wanna play circus?" or the accepted convention (Garvey, 1977) of initial and/or terminal rising intonation in "Pretend we are at a farm?")

Suggest Role for Other - A suggestion or request that a specific role be adopted by another participant. This code item offers a choice to the other players.(e.g., "Do you want to be the baby?" "You can be the kitty, OK?")

Suggest Role for Self - A suggestion or request that a specific role be adopted by oneself. This code item offers a choice to the other players. (e.g., "I can be the driver, OK?" "I'm gonna be the princess, is that OK, huh?"

Agree to Theme or Role and Extend - Following a theme initiation a child either explicitly or implicitly accepts the assignment or suggestion and additionally offers extending material to the topic. (e.g., the responses of George, Jenny, and Mark, JOE: "We're can play robbers, OK?" GEORGE: "Yeah, and we can pretend we are gonna take all these jewels."; AMY: "We are gonna pretend our babies are sick." JENNY: "And they got a very high fever."; JOHN: "I am the robber keeping the jewels." MARK: "Yeah, and I will be the cops, OK?") In each case the responder extends the material offered by the initiator.

Reject Theme or Role - A simple rejection of a suggested or assigned theme or role. (e.g., MARTY: "Ely, you are gonna be the baby." ELY: "No I am not."; ANNIE: "Let's pretend we are going to the mountains." EMILY: "Don't say that.")

Description Strategies

Explain Ongoing Themes - A statement providing information to another child about the ongoing play theme. This can be at the time a new child enters the area or during play among participants when the theme is ongoing as when one child has not been actively engaged with the other two for some time and rejoins their play. This may not, however, serve as a suggestion of a new topic. (e.g., "Hi Mary, these are our purses and we are going to the store." said to an Entry Child)

Explain Ongoing Roles - A statement providing information to another child about the ongoing roles of the participants. This can be at the time a new child enters the area or during play among participants when roles are firmly established, it is never a suggestion of new roles. (e.g., in describing what has been going on in play, a child may say, "She is the witch and I am the clown."; or, "John is the driver of the bus and we are the people.")

Seek Clarification of Theme - A request soliciting information about an ongoing theme or one that has been newly suggested or assigned. (e.g., "Do you mean we are at the circus?"; "What are we doing on the bus?"; "Why are our babies sick?")

Seek Clarification of Roles - A request soliciting information about ongoing roles or those newly suggested or assigned. (e.g., "Who is the chief?"; "Are you the mother or is Mary the mother?")

Describe Own Activity - A statement about one's own actions, this includes the pronoun "I" and consists of descriptions of actions in pretense. (e.g., "I am stealing these jewels."; "I am having my lunch and then going to sleep."; "I am going to the store and then I am giving you these.")

Table 1

Mean Proportions of Conversation in Relation to Pretense by Social Status and Sex

| | Social Status Group | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Liked (N=27) | | Disliked (N=28) | | Low Impact (N=29) | | |
| | Girls (N=16) | Boys (N=11) | Girls (N=10) | Boys (N=18) | Girls (N=15) | Boys (N=14) | |
| | M SD | M SD | M SD | M SD | M SD | M SD | F(2, 78) |
| Non Pretend Interaction | | | | | | | 10.95** |
| | $.24_{c}$ (.11) | $.31_{b}$ (.17) | $.39_{a}$ (.15) | $.38_{a}$ (.14) | $.35_{ab}$ (.17) | $.39_{a}$ (.12) | |
| Enactment of Pretense | | | | | | | 3.40* |
| | $.20_{cd}$ (.08) | $.34_{b}$ (.09) | $.33_{b}$ (.10) | $.44_{a}$ (.14) | $.26_{c}$ (.05) | $.35_{b}$ (.16) | |
| Negotiation and Description of Pretense | | | | | | | 6.01** |
| | $.56_{a}$ (.21) | $.35_{b}$ (.12) | $.28_{c}$ (.11) | $.18_{d}$ (.14) | $.39_{b}$ (.12) | $.26_{c}$ (.15) | |

Note: Means with the same subscript (within rows) are not significantly different from each other according to Duncan Multiple Range tests ($p < .05$).

* $p < .01$
** $p < .001$

Table 2

Mean Proportions of Negotiation and Description Strategies by Social Status

| | Social Status Group | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Liked (N=27) | | Disliked (N=28) | | Low Impact (N=29) | | |
| | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | F(2, 78) |
| Negotiation Strategies | | | | | | | |
| Assign Theme | $.03_b$ | (.06) | $.10_a$ | (.05) | $.03_b$ | (.07) | 7.33 * |
| Assign Role for Other | $.008_b$ | (.004) | $.07_a$ | (.06) | $.009_b$ | (.005) | 23.12 * |
| Assign Role for Self | .02 | (.05) | .04 | (.05) | .02 | (.04) | .79 |
| Suggest Theme | $.03_b$ | (.04) | $.08_a$ | (.07) | $.02_b$ | (.03) | 18.44 * |
| Suggest Role for Other | $.01_b$ | (.02) | $.05_a$ | (.07) | $.01_b$ | (.04) | 12.38 * |
| Suggest Role for Self | .03 | (.03) | .03 | (.05) | .04 | (.03) | .96 |
| Accept Theme or Role & Extend | $.24_a$ | (.10) | $.05_c$ | (.06) | $.19_b$ | (.05) | 18.84 * |
| Reject Theme or Role | $.04_b$ | (.06) | $.17_a$ | (.09) | $.06_b$ | (.07) | 16.93 * |
| Description Strategies | | | | | | | |
| Explain Themes | $.09_a$ | (.11) | $.006_c$ | (.03) | $.05_b$ | (.06) | 9.91 * |
| Explain Roles | $.06_a$ | (.08) | $.005_c$ | (.02) | $.02_b$ | (.03) | 9.06 * |
| Seek Clarification of Theme | $.20_a$ | (.08) | $.03_b$ | (.05) | $.20_a$ | (.10) | 19.64 * |
| Seek Clarification of Roles | $.20_a$ | (.05) | $.03_c$ | (.03) | $.15_b$ | (.06) | 17.08 * |
| Describe Own Activity | $.06_c$ | (.08) | $.34_a$ | (.15) | $.20_b$ | (.08) | 15.41 * |

Note: Means with the same subscript (within rows) are not significantly different from each other according to Duncan Multiple Range tests ($p < .05$).

* $p < .001$

Table 3

Mean Proportions of Negotiation and Description Strategies by Social Status and Sex

| | Social Status Group | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Liked | | Disliked | | Low Impact | | |
| | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | F(2, 78) |
| Assign Theme | | | | | | | .50 |
| Girls | .02 | .04 | .07 | .04 | .03 | .06 | |
| Boys | .05 | .08 | .11 | .05 | .04 | .09 | |
| Assign Role for Other | | | | | | | 7.89* |
| Girls | $.001_c$ | .001 | $.03_b$ | .04 | $.002_c$ | .001 | |
| Boys | $.00_c$ | .00 | $.09_a$ | .06 | $.00_c$ | .00 | |
| Assign Role for Self | | | | | | | .18 |
| Girls | .004 | .001 | .03 | .04 | .007 | .02 | |
| Boys | .04 | .08 | .04 | .06 | .03 | .05 | |
| Suggest Theme | | | | | | | 12.47* |
| Girls | $.03_c$ | .02 | $.15_a$ | .05 | $.03_c$ | .03 | |
| Boys | $.09_b$ | .04 | $.04_c$ | .04 | $.02_c$ | .03 | |
| Suggest Role for Other | | | | | | | 14.87* |
| Girls | $.01_b$ | .007 | $.11_a$ | .07 | $.02_b$ | .04 | |
| Boys | $.02_b$ | .03 | $.01_b$ | .03 | $.01_b$ | .03 | |
| Suggest Role for Self | | | | | | | 19.08* |
| Girls | $.01_b$ | .02 | $.07_a$ | .03 | $.03_b$ | .02 | |
| Boys | $.05_a$ | .02 | $.01_b$ | .03 | $.04_b$ | .05 | |
| Accept Theme or Role and Extend | | | | | | | .26 |
| Girls | .28 | .09 | .09 | .06 | .21 | .16 | |
| Boys | .21 | .07 | .02 | .05 | .16 | .05 | |
| Reject Theme or Role | | | | | | | 9.80* |
| Girls | $.06_c$ | .07 | $.10_b$ | .05 | $.08_{bc}$ | .03 | |
| Boys | $.03_d$ | .04 | $.21_a$ | .08 | $.08_{bc}$ | .09 | |
| Explain Themes | | | | | | | .45 |
| Girls | .10 | .09 | .003 | .01 | .05 | .07 | |
| Boys | .10 | .13 | .008 | .03 | .02 | .04 | |
| Explain Roles | | | | | | | .12 |
| Girls | .06 | .06 | .003 | .006 | .02 | .02 | |
| Boys | .06 | .09 | .006 | .02 | .01 | .03 | |
| Seek Clarification of Theme | | | | | | | 1.99 |
| Girls | .24 | .14 | .05 | .04 | .19 | .12 | |
| Boys | .16 | .09 | .02 | .05 | .18 | .11 | |
| Seek Clarification of Roles | | | | | | | 2.45 |
| Girls | .15 | .08 | .04 | .03 | .16 | .08 | |
| Boys | .07 | .04 | .02 | .03 | .14 | .05 | |
| Describe Own Activity | | | | | | | 1.57 |
| Girls | .05 | .01 | .24 | .11 | .16 | .10 | |
| Boys | .11 | .06 | .39 | .14 | .25 | .08 | |

Note: Means with the same subscript (within rows) are not significantly different from each other according to Duncan Multiple Range tests ($p < .05$).

* $p < .001$